

Remarks by H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

At Induction of University of Liberia Student Union Officers

University of Liberia Campus, Friday, August 20, 2010

Officers and Members of the Executive Committee;

Members of the Student Body;

Faculty and Staff;

Ladies and Gentlemen of this Flagship Institution:

I am happy to accept your invitation to speak today, as you induct officers of UL's Student Union. Indeed, as The Visitor of the University, I come here as often as I can.

As our nation's highest institution of learning, UL plays a seminal and pivotal role in transforming the minds of our young people by providing them with the skills and competence that enable them to make meaningful contributions to our nation's growth and development.

I know this to be true because many graduates of this institution today hold key positions in our Government. I value the quality and level of their work because of their dedication and commitment to go the extra mile for our country. I expect no less from you as well.

Dear Students:

A fundamental challenge facing Liberia today is the need to train leaders for tomorrow – individuals who will provide genuine

leadership and direction in confronting and tackling complex socio-economic problems; leaders we can count on to make a difference.

Facing these challenges requires serious preparation by you, as students. It means that you must constantly redefine your priorities and attitudes to correspond to the academic standards the current administration is setting. One clear way you can do this is to devote your time and energy to rigorous and serious academic study. You must harness the critical skills being taught in order to increase your competitiveness.

This is especially important because as our country gravitates towards a level where we are recognized as a major economic contender in the region, it is imperative that we develop the indigenous talent to meet future challenges and opportunities.

We must, therefore, approach the future from two perspectives: from the Government's side, and from you, the students.

First, is for the Government to ensure greater support to the University. This our administration has done since we came into office, always justifying the need for additional support to tertiary education, cognizant that it is through investment in higher education that we will realize our potential and competitiveness.

Government's current subsidy to UL alone is US\$7.5 million, or 60 percent of the University's budget. When we came into office in 2006, the appropriation to the University was a mere US\$1.1 million, for a student body of over 15,000. It has increased steadily: to \$2.3 million in 2007; \$4.1 million in 2008; and \$7.5 million in 2009, for some 19,000 students. While we recognize that more is required, Government's financial investment in tertiary education is competitive with other sectors. Our commitment and appreciation of the role of this University in national redevelopment are unequivocal.

Our goal is to create a State-run university system that will turn out graduates whose academic profiles match, and even surpass, those of students from other universities in the region and beyond.

Let us have no illusions about this goal: it is neither impossible nor utopian; it is realizable and contemporary!

In the next year or so, the majority of you will relocate to the newly completed Fendell Campus, a venue that is quintessentially fitting for serious academic engagement and concentration. It is far removed from the hustle and boisterousness of city life, and there will be fewer distractions for young students who will live in the dormitories and surrounding areas. This idyllic setting alone will increase your appetite for study – at least I hope so.

I can guarantee that you will not miss this Capitol Hill campus at all. For now, Fendell has no political palaver hut where you can shout slogans and engage in endless political debates. What Fendell has is a biological and chemical laboratory where those in the Science College can spend their time deciphering complex scientific conundrums such as the relationship between atoms on the Periodic Table. That is the ideal setting for those seeking to engage in serious academic pursuits, leading to successful lives and careers.

Nevertheless, this Capitol Hill campus has important legacies that we should not forget. Many before you came here to acquire knowledge and went on to make valuable contributions in the struggle for peace and justice in our country. As we enjoy that freedom, let us not take for granted, but show appreciation for what they fought, and, in some instances, died, for.

The second perspective refers to you, the inductees. It calls for you to play your part as students. I urge you to lead and represent the interests of the approximately 19,000 students on this and satellite campuses. Your leadership must be a paradigm shift from the past –

one that will inspire academic excellence rather than student political rhetoric, which is sometimes used to foster the agenda of self-interested individuals outside this campus who wish to gain political relevance at your expense.

Say no to all of us, and pay attention to your studies in order to make a difference!

You must lead your peers into a new era in student life, one which aspires to engage the administration in a constructive manner so that your demands can be addressed in a timely fashion.

You must respect one another and those you govern, and make decisions that will benefit everyone rather than only a few. Do not serve a narrow interest. See yourselves as being beyond mediocrity, greed, and intolerance.

Student leadership is a platform to national leadership. The credentials you set for yourselves today can define you for the rest of your life.

I congratulate you on your election. Serve with distinction, and make yourselves, your peers, and your University proud. I wish you success in your endeavors.

I thank you.